

Federal Funds Build on Successes of Rural Area Economic Partnership Program Which Hinchey Established in 1999

Owego, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that he has secured approval from a House panel for \$250,000 in federal funds to strengthen the Tioga Rural Area Economic Partnership (REAP) program -- an initiative designed to spur economic growth in the county. Hinchey was joined at the event by members of the REAP board and local officials. The new federal funds, which were approved last week by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, will be used to hire a new executive director to oversee and improve economic development initiatives undertaken by the REAP. As a member of the Agriculture Subcommittee, Hinchey helped establish the Tioga REAP Zone in 1999.

"Over the course of the last decade, the Tioga REAP has grown to be a critical part of Tioga County's economic and community development efforts," said Hinchey. "These new federal funds that I requested will help strengthen the program by allowing for a new executive director to be hired so that economic development efforts can be more expansive and better coordinated. I will continue working to ensure that these funds are approved by the full House so that we can help create businesses, put people to work, and grow the overall local economy in Tioga County."

In addition to hiring a new executive director, the federal funds will be used to help identify needs and opportunities for economic development and to coordinate applications for competitive grants from federal and state agencies and private foundations. Since its creation, over \$20 million in federal, state and local funding has been secured by the Tioga REAP for projects including:

- Workshops to help small business owners improve operations
- Upgrades and improvements to sewer and water infrastructure in the Town of Barton
- Renovations to the town square and park improvements in the Village of Newark Valley
- Improvements to infrastructure needed to attract development in Lounsberry

Hinchey developed the REAP Zone initiative as part of an effort to help spur economic development in struggling rural areas. REAP Zones are first cousins to the internationally recognized Empowerment Zones & Enterprise Communities and are pilot projects of the USDA.

In January 1999, Hinchey persuaded the USDA to establish this new program in his congressional district on a 10-year trial basis, which was approved by the Clinton administration. As a result, a REAP Zone covering all of Tioga County and a second zone in Sullivan County and Wawarsing were established. The REAP Zones in the State of New York are two of only five such areas in the entire nation.

Last year, USDA Rural Development signed an agreement with both the Tioga REAP and Sullivan County-Wawarsing REAP that extended the REAP program for those areas until September 30, 2012. The authorization to extend the REAP program was made possible through agricultural legislation that Hinchey helped pass through Congress in 2008.

The REAP Zone established a collaborative, citizen-led effort to enhance economic development and enable local communities to develop and implement strategies to create long-term prosperity. The two REAP Zones in New York were established in critical parts of the state that had experienced economic dislocation and job loss as the state's rural economy changed. The REAP Zone initiatives serve as an important model for coordinated efforts to revitalize and diversify distressed rural economies in other regions of New York State and the country.

Approval of the federal funds by the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture is the first and most essential step in appropriations process. The funds must now be approved by the full committee and then the full House.